

Forum Trans-making | Relais Culture Europe " Widening the fields of a citizen research practice " .

Thursday 2 December 2021, 4pm

Co-constructing *savoirs sensibles*: reflections on a research-creation inquiry into the agricultural practice of *lasotè* (Martinique).

A conversation between Francesca Cozzolino (anthropologist, EnsadLab), Sophie Krier (artist-researcher, EnsadLab) and Annick Jubénot (founder of the Lasotè Association, Fonds St Denis, Martinique) moderated by Arnaud Dubois (anthropologist, Ensadlab)

Summary

This encounter gave voice to the artist and anthropologist behind the "Savoir-faire créolisés"¹ project, a "research-creation" inquiry (2020-2022) which aims to develop, through artistic devices, a shared narrative of traditions and knowledge which are constantly being reinvented in horticultural and agricultural daily practices in Martinique. This project, supported by the Ministry of Culture, is developed within the framework of the Plateforme "Art, design et société" of EnsadLab, the research laboratory of the École des Arts Décoratifs, Paris.

This meeting also gave the floor to Annick Jubénot, president of the Lasotè Association, that has since 2013 revived this collective practice of ploughing the earth to prepare it for planting. The various interventions and discussions that followed showed that, much more than just an agricultural tradition, this tradition is also a model of solidarity and cooperation practices transferred from Africa within the plantation system and the colonial social organisation specific to the socialisations of the French Caribbean.

The "Art, Design and Society" platform (Francesca Cozzolino, Arnaud Dubois and Sophie Krier), founded in 2018, questions, through research-creation projects, the notion of *savoir sensible*, by exploring the operative capacity of art and design research to produce embodied and situated knowledge on the ecological, social and political issues of the contemporary world.

Savoir sensible is understood here as the forms of knowledge that arise from research through practice in art and design. But these are not limited to the production of artworks or material objects. They also extend to the expression of knowledge of the natural and social world through a sensitive medium. In this way, our collective and transdisciplinary research on *savoir sensible* produced by art and design becomes an

¹ This presentation text was written for the intervention on 2 December 2021. This research-based artistic project has since been renamed *The Art of Making the Earth Talk*. For more information, visit: <https://lartdefaireparlerlaterre.ensadlab.fr/>

epistemological process, where the *sensible* becomes the comprehensibility of the world and closely depends on specific cultural and temporal universes in which groups of individuals are immersed. Studying the research practices of art and design through the prism of *sensible* knowledge thus forces us to rethink the relationship between art and society, but also between humans and their sensory environment in the construction of our material cultures.

An inquiry in Martinique

The "Savoir-faire créolisés" inquiry is therefore part of both a scientific and artistic context of research in art schools (Dautreya, 2010) and extends the pedagogical and artistic research actions undertaken previously.

Francesca Cozzolino was invited to the Caribbean Arts Campus (CCA) in Fort-de-France in 2017 and 2018. Through projects by young artists and designers at the school, she was introduced to Martinique's culture and the economic, ecological and specific social character of the island.

In 2019, Sophie Krier published *Éloj Kréyol, Meanderings in the field of Decolonial Design*, a bilingual English/French book, punctuated by parts in Creole, which reports on the project "Éloj Kréyol" carried out since 2015 by the Parisian/Guadeloupian design duo dach&zephir. The aim of this book was to highlight the transmission carried out in a school in the city of Le Vauclin by the two designers around neglected or forgotten craft skills, and to contextualise this process within an editorial project bringing together different perspectives, those of Martinican authors such as the sociologist and poet André Lucrèce, or European ones such as the art historian Thomas Golsenne and the critic and writer Lucy Cotter.

This publication was then used to launch the study day "Creolisation through art and design? Creating in the *Tout-monde*", which aims to provide a space for reflection on the way in which the notion of creolisation, in all its epistemological, linguistic, political and cultural richness (Chivallon, 2013), does or does not irrigate contemporary practices in art and design that are based on, and are the fruit of, cultural hybridisation between Europe and the Caribbean.

The "Savoir-faire créolisés" inquiry is an extension of these different research and creation actions and is part of the collaborations that have developed around "Éloj Kréyol". It aims to develop a new field of research on the forms of creolisation of Martinique's rural culture within the Platforme "Art, design et société".

Methodology of the creativity inquiry: documenting and socialising savoir-faire in rural contexts

In this investigation, we wish to combine art and anthropology in order to document how forms of rurality in Martinique are constructed today through the effects of cultural creolisation and give rise to alternative forms of social ecology. The Creole Garden and the practices that are deployed in it will be the object of our investigation since it allows us to think as much about colonial heritage as about contemporaneity and projection towards the future of Martinican society.

Indeed, with the massive rural exodus to Fort-de-France at the end of the 1950s, the Creole garden was transposed to the urban environment where it played an important role in maintaining cultural heritage as well as forms of social cohesion and food autonomy (Jean-Valéry, 2011; Jean-Valéry and Martouzet, 2012).

Whether it is a question of agricultural techniques, dances and popular songs linked to work on the colonial plantations or traditional methods of care using plants (*zèb mal tèt, basil, lemon balm, atoumo, curcuma, zèb à vers...*), the tools used in the agricultural sector or the maximisation of cultivable space or the enrichment of the soil with carbon in the urban Creole garden, these ways of doing things show us how in everyday life (De Certeau, 1990) practices of 'creative resistance' continue to emerge (Touam Bona 2016) that can be understood as responses to the combined loss of cultural specificity (extinction of language forms, oral traditions, dance and music techniques or craft practices) and ecological specificity (extinction of species, pollution of the land by toxic pesticides such as *chlordécone*).

How is the rural context of Martinique in all its diversity and complexity affected by such dynamics? The consequences of such 'troubles' (Haraway, 2016) seem to play out mainly at two levels: on the one hand, the implementation of actions to preserve the heritage of rural practices and biodiversity is becoming urgent; on the other hand, the economic stakes linked to the export of Martinique's products (bananas and other fruits and vegetables, sugar cane, rum, fishery by-products, fossil fuels) are becoming increasingly important. The multiple tensions between the rural and (peri-)urban worlds are another major issue: many of Martinique's rural hills are falling prey to "sprawl" and are disappearing in the face of the densification of built-up areas. When considering these issues, it should not be forgotten that the rural context in Martinique no longer corresponds solely to the agricultural context: it also includes the renewable energy sector and brings together all the collective representations, forms of identity and functioning of rural areas.

The approach aiming at sustainable development in rural areas is carried out today by small producers who innovate with ancestral techniques to cultivate the land in an environmentally respectful way, in localised systems, in conjunction with initiatives of rural tourism and producers' markets; in urban areas, initiatives of shared gardens such as that of Trénelle-Citron in Fort-de-France enrich the abundance of family Creole

gardens by favouring social cohesion and by helping to raise awareness of the users of the site on an environmental and nutritional level.

For our research, we are particularly interested in the links between the "Creole garden" (heir to the subsistence garden that slaves cultivated near their huts) and the contemporary (peri-) urban shared garden. Indeed, the organisation of gardens reveals a Caribbean cosmology and gives physical form both to the relationship with the environment and the social environment (Benoît, 2000) and to the relationship with the memory of slavery. Indeed, the 'rural contexts' in the Caribbean are themselves the result of the creolisation that began during the period of slavery. It is to this culture resulting from creolisation that the small producers of the Mornes cling, whether it be production techniques, the magico-religious relationship to the land or the songs linked to working the land (Lucrèce, 2019).

The narrative artistic devices that we would like to introduce could then play an important role in the memorial controversies that still animate the Caribbean space today as well as the French cities involved in the "triangular trade" (Cozzolino, 2020). Interrogating such issues through these everyday practices linked to rurality, which make possible more resilient ways of "feeling and thinking with the land" (Escobar, 2018), therefore implies paying attention to both traditions of mutual aid such as "coup de main" which allow for the establishment of a dynamic of solidarity, as well as to those plural manifestations of a "cunning intelligence" (Lucretius, 2019), i.e. an intelligence that goes beyond mere resourcefulness, that continue to be creolised within everyday gestures and words.

More specifically, during a first exploratory inquiry that we conducted in 2021, we focused on locating Creole family gardens in different neighbourhoods (popular and affluent), and on meeting the members (especially the women) of the shared garden of Trénelle-Citron. In order to be able to compare and organise a later conversation between the actors of these spaces (in urban and rural areas), we also went to meet peasant communities such as *Lasoté*, an association of farmers located in the hills of the north of the island whose mission is anchored in "the spirit of mutual aid, exchange, transmission of know-how and life skills".

Lasoté, a collective practice of ploughing the land in preparation for planting, is, more than just an agricultural tradition, also a model of solidarity and cooperation practices transferred from Africa within the plantation system and colonial social organisation specific to the socialisation of the French Caribbean. Since 2013, the *Lasoté* Association, founded by Annick Jubénot, has revived this practice, which is also called *koudmen*, *coup de main*. It is performed to a steady rhythm, produced by the combined work of wind instruments (conch shells), percussion (*tambouyés*, *ti bwa*) and a *kryé* (crier) who orally supports the rhythm of the moving bodies. As much an act of

safeguarding, transmission and socialisation, this ritual allows us to grasp the way in which, in contemporary North Caraïbe Martinique, human collectives form society through technical and aesthetic practices linked to the land.

The experimental and transdisciplinary cooperations that we are working on aim to reevaluate experience, the body, emotions, perception or action as forms of active knowledge that connect the social and the *sensible* (Laplantine, 2005).

Bibliography

ABÉLES Marc, *Anthropologie de la globalisation*, Paris, Patoy&Rivages, 2008.

BENOÎT Catherine, *Corps, jardins, mémoires. Anthropologie du corps et de l'espace à la Guadeloupe*, Paris, CNRS éd, 2000.

De CERTEAU Michel, *L'invention du quotidien*, Paris, Gallimard, 1990.

CHIVALLON Christine. « Créolisation universelle ou singulière ? Perspectives depuis le Nouveau Monde », *L'Homme*, 2013/4 (n°207-208), p. 37-74.

CHIVALLON Christine. *Espace et identité à la Martinique : paysannerie des mornes et reconquête collective 1840-1960*. Paris : CNRS, 1998.

COZZOLINO Francesca. « Aux bords de la critique et de la réconciliation. Controverses mémorielles à Bordeaux : le projet artistique « Les Revenants » in: *Ethnologie Française*, n° 2020/1, p. 31-52.

DAUTREY Jehanne, *La Recherche en art*, Paris: Éditions MF, 2010.

ESCOBAR Arturo, *Sentir-penser avec la terre. Une écologie au-delà de l'Occident*, traduit de l'espagnol par l'Atelier de Minga. Paris, Seuil, coll. « Anthropocène », 2018.

GLISSANT Édouard, *Introduction à une poétique du divers*, Paris: Gallimard, 1996.

HARAWAY Donna, *Staying with the trouble: making kin in the Chthulucene*, Durham/London, Duke University, 2016.

JEAN-VALÉRY Marc, « Le jardin créole à Fort-de-France : stratégie de résistance face à la pauvreté ? », *VertigO - la revue électronique en sciences de l'environnement* [En ligne], Volume 11 Numéro 1 | mai 2011, mis en ligne le 20 mai 2011, consulté le 04 novembre 2020. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/vertigo/10804>.

JEAN-VALERY Marc et MARTOUZET Denis, « Les jardins créoles et ornementaux comme indicateurs socio-spatiaux : analyse du cas de Fort-de-France », *VertigO - la revue électronique en sciences de l'environnement* [En ligne], Hors-série 14 | septembre 2012, mis en ligne le 15 septembre 2012, consulté le 04 novembre 2020. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/vertigo/12526> ;

KRIER Sophie (dir.), dach&zephir, COTTER Lucy, GOLSENNE Thomas, LUCRÈCE André. *Eloj Kréyol : Meanderings in the field of decolonial design*, Eindhoven: Onomatopee, 2019

LAPLANTINE François, *Le social et le sensible*, Téraèdre, 2005.

LUCRÈCE André, « Paroles Créoles », dans : KRIER Sophie (dir.), dach&zephir, COTTER Lucy, GOLSENNE Thomas, LUCRÈCE André, *Eloj Kréyol : Meanderings in the field of decolonial design*, Eindhoven: Onomatopee, 2019, p. 102-104.

LUCRÈCE André, *Antilles, les paroles, les visages et les masques*, Paris : Ed. L'Harmattan, 2019

STENGERS Isabelle. *Résister au désastre*, Marseille : Wildproject, 2019

TOUAM BONA Dénètem, *Fugitif où cours-tu ?* Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 2016